

WSIS

World Summit on the Information Society

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WSIS: from Geneva to Tunis

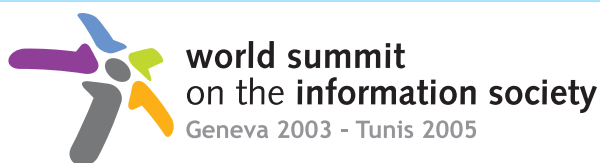
The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) brings together governments, United Nations agencies, industry leaders, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and media representatives in a single high-level policy making process. The ultimate aim of the WSIS is to develop a clear statement of political will and a plan of action to ensure that everyone can participate in the information society and benefit from the opportunities that ICTs can offer to create, access, utilize and share knowledge and information.

The WSIS is the first Summit to take place in two sessions – the first took place Geneva in December 2003, and the second will be held in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005. With less than a year to go before the Tunis Summit, preparations are well under way – also in ACP countries. This issue of *ICT Update* provides a snapshot of key WSIS events, issues and actors en route to Tunis.

At the end of WSIS in Geneva two issues remained unresolved: Internet governance and financing. Of these, the question of financing is of particular relevance to ACP countries. At the Geneva Summit, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, speaking on behalf of all developing countries, presented a proposal for the creation of a 'Digital Solidarity Fund' to finance the development of ICT infrastructure in the South. Pablo Accuosto and Niki Johnson of the Third World Institute provide a brief overview of how the question of financing has been addressed at the WSIS since then. Djilali Benamrane, coordinator of the WSIS Civil Society Working Group on Financing Mechanisms, gives his opinion on the issue of funding for ICTs.

In February 2005 African policy makers will gather in Accra, Ghana, for the second WSIS regional preparatory conference. Of course, the question of financing will be discussed but the central theme of this conference is Access: Africa's key to an inclusive Information Society. Taking up this theme, Willy Currie observes that access involves more than infrastructure, and calls for investments in relevant content and adequate capacity building. In the Q&A, former CTA director Rodney Cooke elaborates on this point, arguing that the WSIS agenda at large should focus less on technology and more on people. Aida Opoku-Mensah highlights other issues on the Accra agenda, stressing that the conference is important not just for ICT pundits and activists, but for all African development actors.

While the continent of Africa may be expected to have some influence on the outcome of the WSIS, the other two smaller ACP regions are much less in a position to do so. Nevertheless, as Abel Caine illustrates, even a small island state such as Fiji can make a difference by actively participating in the WSIS process, and can benefit from the opportunities it offers to do business, negotiate assistance, and – no less important – to bring ICTs to the forefront of national policy priorities. ■



Funding for the information society

At the end of WSIS Summit in Geneva, the question of how to finance efforts to bridge the digital divide remained unresolved. The proposal of President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal to create a 'Digital Solidarity Fund' (see page 3) was warmly received in the South, including in many ACP countries. Northern countries, including the European Union, were much less receptive to the idea. Recently, in a communication to the WSIS Bureau, the EU expressed its opinion that 'it is yet to be convinced as to the need for the creation of a separate Digital Solidarity Fund'. Instead, the EU leans to the view that 'ICTs should be regarded as tools for development and not as an end in themselves', and welcomes that 'donor funding for ICTs in development is increasingly provided through their integration and incorporation ... into country-owned development strategies'.¹

Yet, the EU is prepared to earmark some development funding for ICTs. This became apparent at the WSIS Summit in Geneva, when on 10 December 2003, the EU and the ACP countries signed a Joint Position on the Information Society for Development. In this document, the signatories declared their intention to intensify collaboration to develop information society strategies in ACP countries. They also called for regulatory environments to include provisions on universal access at affordable costs. Most importantly, the signatories expressed their support for an 'ACP Programme on ICTs' to be submitted 'to the appropriate EU decision-making bodies', stressing the importance that 'the programme addresses key themes as they emerge from the WSIS ...'.²

On 13 July 2004, the European Commission announced that it had 'recently approved an "ACP ICT Programme" as a first step towards implementing the [Joint Position] signed between the EU and the ACP countries at the Geneva Summit'.³ At the time of writing, a feasibility study for this programme is being reviewed.⁴

Meanwhile, in Africa, where the issue of funding will feature prominently on the agenda of the regional WSIS Conference in Accra in February 2005 (see page 5), support for the Digital Solidarity Fund appears to be growing. On 3 July 2004, the Executive Council of the African Union (AU) called upon member states 'to support the Digital Solidarity Fund and its effective implementation'. More recently, at the third EU-AU ministerial meeting in Addis Ababa, 2-3 December 2004, African ministers requested their European colleagues to provide support for the Fund. Whereas the EU delegation 'took note of the request',⁵ the issue of funding for the information society remains as yet undecided. ■

Maarten H.J. van den Berg, Editor *ICT Update*.

¹ Preliminary EU Views on the Preparatory Process for the Tunis Phase of the Summit (EU-2004-0527, short version), 28 May 2004.

² ACP-EU Joint Position on the Information Society for Development, 10 December 2003.

³ EC, Communication on WSIS (COM 480), 13 July 2004.

⁴ In September 2004, The EC assigned InfoDev to supervise a feasibility study, including recommendations for the design of a possible new ICT for development program in ACP countries. See: www.infodev.org

⁵ African Union communiqué: Africa-Europe Dialogue, third meeting of the Troikas, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4 December 2004.

Key issue: Financing the information society

Pablo Accuosto and Niki Johnson assess how the issue of financing has been addressed at the WSIS to date.

At the end of the WSIS in Geneva two issues remained unresolved: Internet governance and financing of ICTs for development (ICT4D). Of these, the issue of financing is particularly relevant to developing countries. At the second meeting of the WSIS Preparatory Committee (PrepCom2), held in Geneva in February 2003, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal spoke on behalf of countries in the South. To bridge the digital divide, he argued, there was a need for a transfer of resources from the North for the development of ICTs in the South. This transfer should be based on the notion of 'digital solidarity'.

At PrepCom3, in September 2003, the Senegalese delegation once again raised the issue, and proposed the creation of a Digital Solidarity Foundation. The Foundation's mission would be to manage a Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) that would be fed by voluntary donations from countries in the North. The final version of the proposal, presented at the Geneva Summit in December 2003, suggested that these voluntary donations be raised on sales of personal computers, software and network equipment (a dollar in each case) and on the use of international communications. The fund would also receive contributions from the private sector, governments and other voluntary donors. The resources of the DSF would be used for: (1) the development of infrastructure; (2) the development of applications and services for public administrations and communities (health, education, etc.), in particular for

marginalized groups; (3) the development of new markets and creation of stable jobs; and (4) human resources capacity building.

Senegal's proposal was backed by the majority of countries in the South, including African countries, but the governments of most developed nations strongly opposed it. The US and the EU argued that financing should be sought through existing mechanisms, not by creating new ones. As exemplified by President Bush's Digital Freedom Initiative (DFI), many developed countries preferred market-based financing of ICT4D – i.e. through the promotion of private sector investment.

The position adopted by the governments of the developed nations was backed by the private sector, represented at the Summit through the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI). For their part, participating civil society organizations (CSOs) declared that 'existing and new financing measures should be envisaged and appraised', including the DSF, provided that it 'clearly states its goals [and] is transparently managed'.

The final text of the WSIS Declaration of Principles does not establish the Fund as proposed by Senegal. Instead, the issue of how to finance the development of ICTs in the South was effectively transferred to the second phase of WSIS.

Shortly before the Summit closed, however, the cities of Geneva and Lyon and the government of Senegal announced contributions totalling about €1 million, representing the first three



ITU/Andre Longchamp

payments towards the DSF, thus rescuing the initiative from total failure. By May 2004, the cities of Paris, Rome, Bilbao, New York and Turin had also expressed their willingness to contribute to the DSF, leading to the official inauguration of the Fund on 17 November 2004 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan requested the UNDP to set up a task force to study existing financing mechanisms and to consider innovative ways of financing ICTs for development. The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) was formally launched on 4 October in New York. Chaired by UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown, the TFFM will prepare a report to be submitted to the WSIS PrepCom2 in February 2005. ■

This article is based on the paper 'Financing the Information Society in the South: A global public goods perspective' by **Pablo Accuosto** and **Niki Johnson** (Third World Institute, June 2004). You can download the paper at www.choike.org/documentos/johnson_accuosto.pdf.

Opinion

It is instructive to examine the indices of digital access provided by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and to compare them with those of the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI). It is apparent that the quality of access to ICTs is directly related to average education and income levels and, more generally, to the development of countries. Indeed, the 'digital divide' is just one expression of the North-South divide, which continues to persist despite the many efforts of the international community to diminish it. Efforts to bridge the digital divide cannot stand alone. The proposed Digital Solidarity Fund, however laudable its aims

may be, will not suffice as it depends on voluntary contributions. Instead, it would be preferable to include funding for ICTs in existing financing for development mechanisms, provided that these are thoroughly re-examined and reformed to make them more transparent and accountable, and better able to address the reality of increasing inequalities on a global scale. ■

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Access to ICTs for agricultural development

Improved access to global information networks and adequate capacity building are essential for African agricultural producers, according to Willy Currie.

Access to ICTs is a key theme in the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action adopted in Geneva in 2003. The overall target is to 'ensure that more than half the world's inhabitants have access to ICTs within their reach' by 2015.¹ From this ambitious goal, three processes have emerged in the second phase of WSIS, which will culminate in the Summit in Tunis in November 2005. These three processes are geared to answering the following questions:

- * Where are we with regard to global access to global information networks? This process of stocktaking aims to assess what has been achieved so far in reaching the access target.

- * What is the current state of global ICT policy and governance, and are all stakeholders involved? In this second process a working group has been established to evaluate the status of Internet governance.

- * What financial mechanisms exist for providing universal ICT access to global information networks, and should new ones be created? The third process centres on the question of where the financial resources will come from to achieve the 2015 target.

All of these issues have an impact on rural development and agriculture in developing countries. In the event that the developed countries agree to phase out their domestic farm subsidies in the WTO Doha round of trade negotiations, agricultural producers in developing countries will be able to gain more equitable access to global markets on a basis. However, these markets run on global information networks, and developing country producers will remain at a disadvantage if they are not connected.

Therefore, the challenge is not simply to increase rural access at a national level, but to connect rural agricultural producers to markets through global information networks. At the very least, this means building open networks in developing countries that anyone can utilize, and to follow this up by providing incentives for network operators to extend access to rural areas beyond national telecommunication infrastructures. This would be an

enormous undertaking. Africa has the lowest levels of Internet penetration, despite the existence of the SAT 3 fibre optic cable along the west coast of the continent that provides connections to the Internet backbone infrastructure. In Africa there are just 111 users per 10,000 people, compared with 585 in Asia, 2444 in the Americas and 3333 in Europe. Similarly, Africa has only three Internet hosts per 10,000 inhabitants, in contrast with 37 in Asia, 955 in Oceania, 1440 in the Americas and 229 in Europe.²

This limited penetration can be attributed to unreliable connections, and the high cost of using the telecommunication infrastructure. With an average cost of US\$ 1500 for each new fixed telephone connection, increasing the penetration and reliability of networks would be enormously expensive, particularly in rural areas. A recent report from DFID has estimated that extending regional backbone infrastructure networks in Africa would cost \$500–1000 million.³ To this would have to be added the costs of upgrading national backbone networks and extending connectivity beyond those networks into rural areas. It has been estimated that doubling the current ICT infrastructure in Africa could cost \$8–12 billion.

Access involves more than infrastructure

Achieving the 2015 access target will involve more than physical connectivity. Many challenges need to be addressed, such as developing the capacity of agricultural producers to enable them to use ICTs effectively as part of their production, marketing and distribution activities. Others include the provision of relevant content in local languages and useful applications.

Governments of developing countries tend to overemphasize technical solutions to the problems of ICT access. From their perspective, providing infrastructure and increasing access to ICTs may seem the most logical primary goals. Developing content and investing in human capacity may appear secondary, less important priorities, yet they are crucial to ensure that ICTs are



effective in supporting development, and should be integral to all rural development and poverty reduction strategies.

Policy makers involved in agriculture and rural development need to examine the issues (most notably financing) on the agenda of the WSIS PrepCom2 to be held in Geneva from 17–25 February 2005. They must consider whether the agenda adequately addresses the need to improve access to information networks in rural areas, and if it does not, engage with the WSIS to do something about it. Just two weeks before PrepCom2, African policy makers will have an opportunity to do just that, as they gather in Accra for the second WSIS regional conference from 2–4 February 2005. Rightly, the theme of the conference will be 'Access: Africa's key to an inclusive information society'. ■

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¹ WSIS Plan of Action, 2003, paragraph B6(j).

² Fair Access to Internet Report (FAIR), IDRC, February 2004

³ Balancing Act, DFID: African ICT Infrastructure Options, 2004

WSIS round two, phase two – African perspectives

Aida Opoku-Mensah believes that the upcoming WSIS regional conference in Accra, Ghana, is important not just for ICT pundits and activists, but for all African development actors.

Africa's participation in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process began at the first regional preparatory conference in Bamako in May 2002. Hosted by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the government of Mali, the Bamako conference was attended by representatives of stakeholders from all African countries.

For Africa, WSIS could not have come at a better time. Most countries have embarked on a series of long overdue changes in the telecommunication sector through deregulation and privatization. These changes are key to improving the generally poor telecommunication infrastructure and expanding access to all. The exponential growth in the use of mobile telephony and wireless technologies, as well as the explosion in broadcasting services, in particular community and commercial radio, demonstrate that even though the continent might not be a hub of technological development, it is certainly not being left behind!

It therefore came as no surprise that representatives of 48 African countries attended the WSIS in Geneva, including 16 heads of state and prime ministers, 79 ministers and their deputies and 53 ambassadors, not to mention the many representatives of civil society organizations, the education sector and the media.

Preparing for Tunis: the Accra conference

As part of the preparations now under way for the Tunis phase of WSIS, the second Africa regional conference will be held in Accra, Ghana, from 2–4 February 2005. Since the Tunis phase will focus on the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action adopted in Geneva, the African regional conference will review the actions taken by African countries to reduce the digital divide and to adopt a regional action plan based on the African Information Society Initiative (AISII), which is the only regional framework of its kind.

The central theme of the Accra conference is 'Access: Africa's key to an inclusive information society'. The many

issues to be discussed include infrastructure, ICT applications for socio-economic development, Internet governance, indicators, and financing mechanisms. Since Africa is a largely agrarian continent, it is expected that we will see many countries wanting to develop strategies in the area of ICTs for agriculture and rural development.

Key policy issues for Africa

Several key policy issues are on the agenda of the Accra conference. One issue is the need for a stocktaking of national e-strategies, which most African countries are now putting in place. Another issue is to assess the status of policy making at the regional level. Initiatives now under way include the development of a legal framework for e-commerce by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an e-strategy by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and an e-government strategy by the East African Community (EAC) in cooperation with UNECA.

There will also be pre-conference workshops that will bring together various stakeholders to discuss aspects of the information society, including a workshop on 'ICTs and poverty reduction', hosted by UNECA and the OECD. The aim of this workshop is to enable UNECA-assisted countries currently implementing their national e-strategies to focus on rural development and poverty reduction and ways to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

ICT4D: not just relevant for ICT pundits

If I had to pick just five outcomes that I would most like to see emerge from the Accra conference, these would be:

1. that ICT investments become a permanent feature of African national budgets, and not just items of expenditure from donors;
2. that expansion of the information society becomes part of all rural development efforts, with a greater commitment to extending the ICT infrastructure into rural areas than is



Aida Opoku-Mensah

currently the case;

3. that specific sets of regulations are put in place to enable telecom and mobile operators to build adequate networks that will reach rural areas;
4. that certain aspects of the information society of particular importance to Africa are addressed, such as content in local languages; and
5. that 'm-commerce' is taken seriously – the growth in the use of mobile telephony is a perhaps uniquely African development and offers many ordinary people access trade and commerce opportunities.

More generally, I hope that as many development actors as possible come to Accra to enrich and strengthen the ICT4D discussions from a real development perspective. The conference is relevant not just for ICT pundits and activists. There will be no point in discussing ICTs and agriculture or rural development, for instance, unless extension workers and the entire agricultural community participate in the discussions, and even lead the debate. At this stage in the development of an information society in Africa, we need to consider how ICTs can be embedded into development. The challenge is to ensure that the wider development community gets on board the WSIS bandwagon to make sure it delivers the goods! ■

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Fiji and the World Summit on the Information Society

Abel Caine reports on how Fiji's involvement in the WSIS process has brought ICTs to the top of the national political agenda.

As a member of the Fijian delegation, I was just one of the 11,000 participants from 175 countries, including 44 heads of state, at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in December 2003. We had gathered to develop a better understanding of the information revolution and its impact on the international community, but I was also able to discuss the best routes to Fiji and possible trade deals.

During one of the sessions I found myself sitting next to the President of Finland, Ms Tarja Halonen, and she asked where I was from. 'Ahh, Fiji ... paradise', she replied when I told her. Ms Halonen then turned to the man sitting next to her and asked, 'Jorma, does Nokia have an office in Fiji?' Jorma Ollila is the CEO of the Finnish company Nokia, the world's largest mobile phone supplier. As I sat there next to the president of a country and the head of Nokia, I thought about the ultimate goal of the Summit – to bring the benefits of ICTs to all nations – and began to imagine what it could mean for Fiji.

Fiji's involvement in the WSIS all started from an email I sent to a few colleagues in the Pacific in late 2002 about the 'wee-sis' summit, and asking what we should do about it. Within days we had a busy email list (WSIS Pacific) up and running, and by January

2003 about 20 representatives of 10 Pacific Island countries were heading for the WSIS Asia regional conference in Tokyo. We had worked long and hard on the wording of the 'SIDS' paragraph that was to be included in the Tokyo Declaration. It was therefore tragic to see our beautifully crafted paragraph reduced to just a brief reference to 'small island developing states' in the final declaration.

By doing the diplomatic rounds and attending meetings, I have become much wiser in the ways of 'horse-trading' and national interest politics. Fiji may have missed out with the SIDS paragraph in Tokyo, but it scored big with the 'youth' paragraph of the WSIS Geneva Declaration of Principles. Two full sentences were taken directly, with full consensus, from the Fiji submission: '... We recognize that young people are the future workforce and leading creators and earliest adopters of ICTs. They must therefore be empowered as learners, developers, contributors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers'.

I always feel proud when I see my own words being used in documents or on posters at international youth events. As I was a borderline youth (just 32!) at the time of the Geneva summit, I can now use the 'youth' paragraph as an example to show young Fijians that they too can make a difference.

With the second phase of WSIS now under way, there are still some thorny issues to be settled, such as Internet governance and financing for ICTs for development. Fiji will again participate in the discussions to ensure that our unique needs are acknowledged and, perhaps, reflected in the final declaration. We are aware that such a small country is unlikely to have much influence, but it is heartening to know that it is possible to contribute to the process.

One lesson I learned from attending WSIS was that the side meetings are sometimes more important than the formal sessions. In the corridors of the conference centre and at the numerous meetings, I was able to meet an incredible range of people, and to negotiate financial and technical assistance for Fiji.

No less important, Fiji's involvement in the WSIS process has brought ICTs to the top of the national political agenda. As a result of the constant reporting to senior ministry officials, as well as briefings to cabinet ministers, ICTs are now critical elements in government planning. All ministries are required to produce IT plans to complement corporate strategy plans. What's more, all ICT expenditures are now routed through one agency and linked to a centralized system that is aligned with regional and global obligations (such as WSIS). The Ministry of Finance has allocated US\$6 million for ICTs for development in 2005 and, through contacts made at WSIS, Fiji has almost concluded negotiations with China for a concessional loan of US\$20 million for e-government projects.

I am about to leave my government post, so I won't be representing the Fiji government in Tunis. One day, however, I hope that I will once again be sitting next to the President of Finland, so that I can invite her to Fiji to see how we used the WSIS process to become one of the world's leading ICT countries. ■

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WSIS resources: key events, initiatives and documents

Additional information is available from the web magazine at <http://ictupdate.cta.int>.

EVENTS

WSIS regional conference – Africa

Accra, Ghana, will be the venue for the second African regional preparatory conference of the WSIS, from 2-4 February 2005. The theme of the conference is Access: Africa's key to an inclusive Information Society. Pre-conference workshops are scheduled for 29 January to 1 February 2005.

www.wsisaccra2005.gov.gh

WSIS regional conference – Asia Pacific

The second regional WSIS conference Asia-Pacific is scheduled to take place in mid-2005. The conference is expected to adopt the regional action plan and provide inputs to the Tunis phase of the World Summit. For updates, visit

www.unescap.org/icstd/events/wsisis_2nd_phase/index.aspx

WSIS regional conference - Latin America and the Caribbean

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the second regional WSIS conference will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 8-10 June 2005. For updates, visit the preparatory process page at the WSIS website

www.itu.int/wsisis/preparatory2/index.html

WSIS Tunis

The Tunis Summit, from 16-18 November 2005, will conclude the second phase of the WSIS. For updates on the programme and information about the conference, visit

www.wsistunis2005.org

INITIATIVES

APC ICT Policy Monitor - WSIS

The APC ICT Policy Monitor project is intended to enable civil society organizations to engage in ICT policy development to promote an information society based on social justice and human rights. The aim of the Monitor is to ensure that governments and policy makers recognize that access to and the use of ICTs are basic human rights. The WSIS section of the Monitor is packed with WSIS news, documents and related information resources.

www.apc.org/english/wsisis

CRIS – WSIS news & and resources

Communications Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) is a campaign to ensure that communication rights are central to the

information society and to the upcoming Tunis Summit. The campaign is sponsored and supported by the Platform for Communication Rights, a group of NGOs involved in media and communication around the world.

www.crisinfo.org/content/view/full/49

Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF)

The DSF is an African initiative first proposed by Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal at the WSIS in Geneva, and at the Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society, held in Lyon, France, in December 2003. The Fund, which was officially launched on 17 November 2004 in Geneva, Switzerland, seeks to reduce the global digital divide and promote access of all citizens to the knowledge society. Founding members of the Fund include the Republic of Senegal, the Dominican Republic and the Basque Country, and the cities of Dakar, Geneva, Lille, Lyon, Paris, Rome, Santo Domingo and Turin.

www.dsfsn.org/en/03-en.htm

IT4ALL - Network of Local Authorities for the Information Society

IT4ALL is a network of local authorities worldwide that aims to define and obtain a common position towards the WSIS. IT4ALL has drawn up a Plan of Action for 2004 and 2005, which specifies the actions that the IT4ALL Network members are carrying out in order to eliminate the digital divide. This Plan of Action will be presented at the Summit in Tunis.

www.it4all-regions.org

Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI)

Led by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the CCBI is mobilizing and coordinating the involvement of the worldwide business community in the WSIS process. Through the website Business@WSIS, the CCBI disseminates information about private sector policy positions, CCBI submissions to the WSIS, and speeches of business leaders at the Summit in Geneva in 2003.

www.businessatwsis.net

UNESCO WSIS Action Directory

This site offers a wide range of resources and information on UNESCO's activities around the world that are contributing to the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action.

<http://ictupdate.cta.int/index.php/link/a/926>

WSIS Gender Caucus (GC)

The WSIS GC is a multi-stakeholder group of women and men from national governments, civil society organizations, NGOs, the private sector and the United Nations system. The Caucus aims to ensure that gender equality and women's rights are integrated into WSIS and its outcome processes. Since its launch in May 2002, the GC has produced a number of position papers, advocacy briefs and a sourcebook, *Creating Your Own National Gender Programme: A Practical Guide*, for gender equality advocates.

www.genderwsis.org

DOCUMENTS

Frequently Asked Questions about Conducting a National WSIS Consultation Process

Produced by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), this guide outlines the key aspects and the steps to take when organizing or participating in a national consultation around ICT policy, in this case the debates raised by the WSIS. The guide is intended for civil society organizations who are active in promoting the use of ICTs, but who may not be involved in national policy processes.

http://rights.apc.org/nationalfaq_wsisis_v1.pdf

Fair Access to Internet Report (FAIR)

Report on the state of Internet access in Africa, prepared by the LINK Center and Mike Jensen in consultation with Research ICT Africa! members for the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and the Open Society Initiative (OSI). The findings of this report were presented at the WSIS in Geneva in 2003.

<http://ictupdate.cta.int/index.php/filemanager/download/180>

Making ICTs work for food security in Africa

Brief prepared by Romeo Bertolini for the conference 'Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020: Prioritizing Actions, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships', held in Kampala, Uganda, in April 2004. Africa faces a difficult challenge in meeting the first Millennium Development Goal - to halve the number of people suffering from malnutrition and hunger by 2015. Bridging the digital divide through the development and use of ICTs will not directly solve this challenge, but it could make a significant contribution.

www.ifpri.org/pubs/ib/ib27.pdf

Q&A: ICTs as tools for rural development

According to Rodney Cooke it is necessary to move the WSIS focus away from technology and access, towards ICTs as tools for rural development.

Dr Cooke, 'e-Agriculture' features prominently in the WSIS Plan of Action adopted in Geneva, but it has been largely absent from the agendas of subsequent conferences and policy proposals. How do you explain this apparent lack of interest in ICTs and agriculture since the 2003 summit?

I guess that this reflects two tendencies. The first is the preoccupation of the majority of the WSIS participants with technology and access, rather than with information content for development. Much of the WSIS Plan of Action was aimed at economic impact and development, positing ICTs as possible tools for political and socio-economic empowerment. However, many of the subsequent agendas have reverted to being technology driven, as if ICTs are themselves a solution.

Second, when people talk of development they tend to forget that three-quarters of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. For this reason, until recently much of the development literature gave low priority to agriculture and, indeed, donor financing of rural development has been in relative decline.

Why is it important for agriculture to feature more prominently on the WSIS agenda?

The WSIS, like all recent world summits, paid heed to the Millennium Development Goals. The first of these goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Today 1.1 billion people live on less than US\$1 per day (the internationally recognized poverty threshold). Of these, 325 million live in

sub-Saharan Africa, and most of them in rural areas. There are now many reports describing the impact of increasing agricultural productivity on poverty reduction. One of the most recent I have seen, from IFPRI, is that in Africa a 10% increase in the level of agricultural productivity is associated with a 7.2% reduction in poverty.

In Geneva, you gave a presentation on IFAD's experience with the Internet-based Rural Poverty Knowledgebase (with FIDAMERICA, FIDAFRIQUE and ENRAP). Could you briefly summarize the most important points you made in this presentation?

In Geneva I gave a presentation at IFAD's side event, 'Six years of bridging the rural digital divide'. Much of that presentation, and the subsequent panel discussion, highlighted the need to move the WSIS focus away from technology and access, towards ICTs as tools for development. That is to say, it needs to address how bridging the digital divide can strengthen efforts to foster the political and socio-economic empowerment of rural communities.

In my presentation I focused on experiences with three regional networks that share learning and experiences in rural development among IFAD projects and partners. I also described our Rural Poverty Knowledgebase (www.ifad.org/rural/), which covers thematic areas including rural finance, household food security, gender and targeting, community-based natural resource management (specifically livestock and rangeland management) and sustainable livelihoods approaches.

IFAD's focus on strengthening

capacity and empowering the rural poor underlines the importance of appropriate technology and the need to focus on people and partners – people must be the principal agents of change.

As former director of CTA, what do you think CTA can do to continue to assist ACP countries to influence the WSIS process?

The IFAD side event at WSIS was fortunate in that we were able to secure the participation of the current Director of CTA, Carl Greenidge. The IFAD website features a summary of that event, which captures many of the suggestions about bringing pressure to bear on the WSIS process to focus on ICTs as tools for development rather than the current heavy emphasis on technology, access and the digital divide. In view of its role in strengthening ACP organizations concerned with rural development, CTA is well placed to influence the WSIS process. I anticipate that CTA will continue to view ICTs from the perspectives of the users in ACP countries and will assist rural poor people to lead their own development processes. Similarly, the CTA should continue to join the WSIS push for improved ICTs for development projects, and to encourage EU donors to work with local partners to create an enabling policy environment that will bring about more rapid rural development. ■

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